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ABSTRACT

Thirteen classroom activities designed to provide active language practice for students of English as a second language are described. Some highlight a targeted grammatical structure, and others require that students work together to solve a problem. Each is designated by level of difficulty (beginning, intermediate, or advanced), skill focus (oral or written), and activity type (problem solving, question and answer, or creative/generative). The activities include building an airport, survival, courtroom drama, cartoon captions, missing pictures, traveling tales, building a paragraph, solving a mystery, last letter, dictation box, alibi, Jeopardy, and 20 Questions. (MSE)

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BUILDING AN AIRPORT

AND OTHER FUN ESL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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BUILDING AN AIRPORT AND
OTHER FUN ESL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Discussion activities and problem-solving activities continue to be helpful tools in the language-learning process. The ability to use a language is the product of its continual use in an ever-larger number of contexts. Building an Airport and Other Fun ESL Learning Activities focuses on thirteen useful classroom activities, all of which provide opportunities for students to practice English in a variety of contexts. Several of the activities highlight a targeted grammatical structure, while others require that students work together to solve a "problem." All involve students in English in an engaging way. Indeed, these activities are a response to the need of students of a second or foreign language to enjoy what they learn.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE	ACTIVITY
1	Building an Airport (I to A; O; P)
2	Survival (I to A; O; P)
3	Courtroom Drama (I to A; O; C)
4	Cartoon Captions (B to A; W; C)
5	Missing Pictures (B to A; O,W; C)
	Traveling Tales (B to A; O,W; C)
6	Building a Paragraph (B to A; O,W; P,C)
	Solving a Mystery (I to A; O,W; P)
7	Last Letter (B to A; O; C)
	Dictation Box (B to A; W; P)
8	Alibi (I to A; O; Q)
	Jeopardy (B to A; O; Q)
9	20 Questions (B to A; O; Q,P)

CODE

Level of Difficulty	B--Beginning I--Intermediate A--Advanced
Skill Focus	O--Oral W--Written
Type of Activity	P--Problem Solving Q--Question and Answer C--Creative/Generative

BUILDING AN AIRPORT

You want to build an airport in Tashi in the Himalayas.
Look at the list of steps to complete the project.
Discuss the steps. What will you do first???

1. Transport the hangars to the site.
2. Get a building contractor.
3. Build the air terminal.
4. Get the god-king to say 'yes' to the idea.
5. Construct the control tower.
6. Level the ground.
7. Prefabricate the hangars.
8. Ask the international authority to inspect the airport.
9. Put in the furniture and fittings.
10. Move the sheep away from the site.
11. Dig the foundations.
12. Find a good place for the site.
13. Train the pilots and technicians.
14. Get money from the World Bank.
15. Lease the restaurants and bars.
16. Put in the technical airport equipment.
17. Construct the approach roads to the site.
18. Construct the runways.

SURVIVAL

It is approximately 10 a.m. in mid-August, and you have just crashed in a desert. The plane containing the bodies of the pilot and co-pilot has completely burned, leaving only the frame of the plane. None of you have been injured. You don't know your exact position, but just before the crash, the pilot told you that you were 70 miles southwest of a small camp, which is the nearest known habitation. However, you were already 65 miles off-course, so you don't really know where you are.

The area is flat and the only form of life appears to be a few cacti. The temperature will reach 100, which means a ground temperature of 130. You are dressed in light clothes and you all have handkerchiefs. Between you, your pockets contain a packet of cigarettes and a pen.

Before the plane caught fire, you were able to get some things from it. However, the plane was in danger of exploding at any moment, so you were not able to get everything. List the items in the order you would have taken them, according to their importance to your survival.

flashlight
sharp knife
air map of the area
large plastic raincoat
compass
first-aid kit
gun (loaded)
parachute (red and white)
bottle of 1000 salt tablets
one liter of water each
a book called Edible Animals of the Desert
a pair of sunglasses each
two liters of 180 proof vodka
one warm overcoat each
a cosmetic mirror

COURTROOM DRAMA

Courtroom drama is an opportunity for students to simulate a trial. They play the roles of the people in the trial, creating the testimony (based on a given situation) while the trial unfolds. After all the testimony is presented, a verdict is rendered by the jury. The judge (possibly the teacher) ensures fairness and proper procedure.

EXAMPLE

The situation is the liability case of Hancock vs. Wexler. Hancock is suing for negligence after slipping on a banana peel in front of Wexler's house. Hancock fell and injured his back. Now, each week he has to go to a chiropractor, whose fee is not covered by health insurance. He wants to recover the cost, already over $2000, from Wexler, who says he is in debt and cannot pay. How would you convince the jury either to award the money to Hancock or to free Wexler of liability?

The Players

Hancock
Wexler
Hancock's attorney(s)
Wexler's attorney(s)
witness #1
witness #2
etc.
the jury
the judge

The students who play the attorneys are free to call and question witnesses as well as Hancock and Wexler. They should, however, go over testimony with the witnesses as much as possible before the trial begins. It may be easier to have a team of attorneys representing the principals to better develop strategy and to allow more students to participate.

PEANUTS

STORY TELLING

1. MISSING PICTURES

This game can be done as a class or in small groups. It can be done orally or in writing. Give students two pictures, one to represent the beginning of a story and the other to represent the end. Students create the rest of the story in any way they see fit.

2. TRAVELING TALES

This is a writing activity. Students form rows of no more than five to a row. Each student begins to write a story. After three minutes students pass their papers to the student behind them. The story is continued by that student. Pass again after three and a half minutes. Eventually, the story will return to its owner, who finishes it. Ask students to read any particularly good stories. Increase the time allowed after each pass to allow students time to read the developing story.

TRAVELING TALES (PLUS YOUR 2¢)

This is a variation of the above activity. Each student is given a phrase or series of phrases to work into the stories he or she helps write. As an oral activity, it can be done with the whole class by giving each student a phrase to work into the story as it develops from student to student around the class.

BUILDING A PARAGRAPH

Cut up a paragraph into single sentences. Mix thoroughly. This exercise is to practice logical paragraph development. Students must recognize key words and phrases to be able to order the sentences into a paragraph. Once they have successfully reconstructed the paragraph, you can identify the key words and transitional expressions with them. Be sure to choose a paragraph that has a good, logical flow.

A good follow-up exercise is to give students answers to questions they must then create based on their understanding of the story.

SOLVING A MYSTERY

In the Fall, 1982 edition of Cross Currents (Vol. IX, No. 2), Michael J. Kleindl explained a problem-solving activity called "A Thirty-Clue Mystery--The Barlow Case: A method for Semi-Free Discussion." Briefly, students work together from the given clues to figure out who committed a murder. The mystery usually takes four forty-minute time periods to solve (at least it did for the author's Japanese businessmen). The mystery game is adapted from a game in a book by Gene Stanford and Barbara Dodds Stanford, Learning Discussion Skills Through Games (New York: Citation Press, 1969).

LAST LETTER

This game can be done in sequence around the class or in teams. To do it in teams, first form two teams. An umpire calls out the name of a town (for example). The first member of Team A must call out the name of another town beginning with the last letter of the first one. The first member of Team B must then call out a town beginning with the last letter of Team A's word (e.g. Paris...Shanghai...Istanbul... London). Continue until someone cannot find a name. That team loses, and another category/name is chosen. Use any category (plants, animals, etc.) or even any word (e.g. pen...name...elephant...time).

DICTATION BOX

Prepare a sheet with boxes arranged horizontally in groups of three. Number or letter the boxes. Dictate one word for each box, but do not go in numerical or alphabetical order. After the dictation, students make sentences using all three words in each row.

1 have	2 brother	3 sister	I have a brother and a sister.
4 name	5 is	6 brother's	My brother's name is Jack.
7	8	9	
10	11	12	

ALIBI

The students are told that a crime has been committed and that they are under suspicion. In pairs they prepare an alibi for a given period of time, e.g. between 8 and 12 p.m. the previous evening. Since the pair claims to have spent the period in question together, they must be able to account for everything they did or saw. After 10 or 15 minutes, choose one pair. One member of the pair is put in the witness box, and the other is sent out ot the room. A court scene is then set up. The accused is asked to give an account of his or her activities and whereabouts for the period in question. While s/he does this, the other students take careful notes. When the student has finished the statement, the other students may ask questions. The other member of the pair is then called in and the same procedure followed. Clearly, the object of the game is to find discrepancies in the accounts of the two students.

JEOPARDY

As you may remember, the purpose of this game is to win money by asking correct questions to given answers. By carefully choosing the categories and level of difficulty, you can tailor the game to your class. It can by done as a board game by putting the grid below on the board. As students request a category and amount of money, write the answer in the space. If a correct question is asked for the answer, award the money.

	PEOPLE	MUSIC	SPORTS	ART	PLACES
$50					
$40					
$30					
$20					
$10					

20 QUESTIONS

This is an oldie but a goodie. Put a small household object (a postcard, toothbrush, scissors, etc.) in a brown paper bag. Take the bag to class and let students try to guess what is in it by asking only yes/no questions. You can set a limit of 20 questions or 15 "no" answers.